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Written statement* submitted by Nazra for Feminist Studies, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is hereby circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[8 February 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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WHRDs and Civil Society in Egypt are on the Brink of Total Annihilation

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and feminists in Egypt continue to be targeted for their activism and defense of various rights. Some of them face *Travel Bans, Asset Freeze Orders* and *Arrest Warrants* on the background of case no.173 for 2011 known as the NGO Foreign Funding Case.

A progressive escalation against HRDs and civil society organizations is marked by summons during 2017 by the investigative judge in case no. 173 for 2011 of various staff members and partners in civil society organizations including and not limited to Mohamed Zaree Director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) Egypt office, who appeared before the investigative judge on 24 May 2017 for his interrogation after case documents have been reviewed, where he was released on bail amounting to EGP 30,000, as well as lawyer and HRD Ahmed Ragheb who was released on bail amounting to EGP 5000. The summoned HRDs have all been released on bail ranging from 5000 to 20000 EGP.

Tactics to punish WHRDs and HRDs have included asset freeze orders against several HRDs heading various human rights organizations. On 14 December 2016, an asset freeze was issued against Azza Soliman and her law firm "Lawyers for Justice and Peace". Then on 11 January 2017 an order was issued to freeze the personal assets of Mozn Hassan, those of the company "Nazra for Studies" as well as those of the association "Nazra for Feminist Studies", which sets a precedent in the asset freeze of the registered NGO under the Ministry of Social Solidarity.

The developments in case no.173 for the year 2011 indicate a worrying escalation against feminists in the case and a criminalization of their work. The asset freeze order issued against "Nazra for Feminist Studies" is an unprecedented one in the case, and in the history of civil organizations working on women's human rights, as it is the first time the assets of a registered NGO under law 84 for the year 2002 and under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Solidarity are frozen. Moreover, previous to the asset freeze order, an arrest warrant was issued against Azza Soliman, Lawyer, Founder and Head of Board of Trustees of the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA) based on a request by the investigative judge, where a police force took Soliman from her house, and she was released on bail amounting to EGP 20,000 after hours of investigation.

Travel bans have also been issued as a punishment against HRDs and WHRDs in case 173, such as that issued against prominent WHRD and feminist Mozn Hassan, Founder and Executive Director of Nazra for Feminist Studies, where the Passport Administration at Cairo International Airport banned her from travelling on the morning of 27 June 2016 during completion of her departure procedures from Cairo to Beirut, and she was informed verbally that the travel ban had been issued by the Egyptian General Prosecutor based on the request of the investigative judge. Travel bans also include Esraa Abdel Fattah on 13 January 2015. Abdel Fattah has submitted a petition to the state council in November 2016 to revoke the travel ban, but on 9 May 2017 the Administrative Court dismissed the case for lack of jurisdiction. Mohamed Zaree, the Egypt Office Director of CIHRS, Hoda Abdel Wahab, the Executive Director of the Arab Center for Independence of the Judiciary and Legal Profession, as well as the Executive Director of the Centre for Women's Legal Counseling, and Nasser Amin, HRD and Director of the Arab Centre for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession in Egypt and a member of the National Council for Human Rights, Investigative journalist Hossam Bahgat, HRD Gamal Eid, the Executive Director of ANHRI have also been travel banned.

The recent crackdown has also affected freedom of press, as Egyptian authorities have blocked over a hundred websites on premises of "supporting terrorism" and "spreading lies". The blocked websites have recently included the website "Masreiat", a website made of professional female journalists working to get the voices of Egyptian women heard, and focusing on news related to women's human rights issues, and the Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI).

The re-trial of the Ministerial Cabinet Case concluded. Originally, a lifetime imprisonment verdict and a fine of 17 Million Egyptian Pounds (USD 2,229,215.84) was issued on February 4, 2015 in the case known as the Ministerial Cabinet Case (Case No. 8629 for the Year 2011) by the Sayeda Zeinab Felonies Court. The case includes 3 WHRDs who are still detained since March 3, 2015, namely Shaimaa Ahmed Saad who received a sentence of 5 years

imprisonment; while both Marwa ElSayed Seif Eldin and Abeer Saeed Mohamed Mostafa were acquitted along with 90 others. However, a lifetime imprisonment was confirmed for 43, and a verdict of 10 years imprisonment was issued for 9 juvenile detainees on 25 July 2017. It is important to state that 125 others were not included in the re-trial, and they include 7 women.

Sexual violence against women in the public space continues to remain a grave problem. A national strategy to combat violence against women has been announced and published on May 7, 2015, yet, after more than two years of its publishing, we emphasize the importance of monitoring its implementation. Moreover, the lack of the differentiation between state and non-state actors in the concerned strategy, in addition to the lack of differentiation between violence against women in the private sphere and public one is one of the main issues that need to be addressed in the concerned strategy, in addition to not regarding marital rape as a form of violence against women, no reference to accountability of both state and non-state actors is made, and no provisions are outlined for revising the internal regulations of shelters. With the exception of the Tahrir mob-sexual assaults and gang rapes in June 2014 during the inauguration of President Abdel Fattah ElSisi, no one has been held accountable for mob-sexual assaults and gang rapes committed since November 2012, and only a few individual cases of sexual harassment and sexual assault have had perpetrators held accountable.

Teachers are also subject to crimes of sexual violence, where incidents of sexual assault, rape and mob-sexual assaults have been documented by the media, including the rape of a teacher by a microbus driver and a friend of his on a desolate road in El'Amriya city, in addition to a teacher in a school in Giza governorate who was subjected to a mob-sexual assault by students whom she refused that they cheat on an exam. Teachers continue to suffer from sexual violence amid the lack of provision of safety measures for them, whether in places where they teach, or in transportation routes. During the Journalists' Syndicate sit-in in May 2016, women journalists and WHRDs were physically and sexually assaulted by non-state actors outside the syndicate, with no intervention from security forces present, while a young student was subjected to a mob-sexual assault on 31 March 2017 in Zagazig in Sharkia governorate, with no transparency on the proceedings of the case in general, and investigations against perpetrators in particular. Despite the importance of the presence of policies and legislation issued by the state that feminist groups have always called for, this crime shows their ineffective applications and presence of shortcomings within them, making it important to monitor what is effective and what needs to be applied, in order to enable combat of sexual violence in a more effective manner. The wave of mob-sexual assaults and gang rapes that took place in Tahrir Square and its vicinity, which resulted in mobilization that led to the design of these policies from the state, were not an exception, and the state cannot deal with policies as a temporary measure taken at the primetime of mobilization on sexual violence (SV) and be ignored now. Facing SV mandates daily and strong efforts to enable and develop designed mechanisms. There is also a dire necessity to design and implement policies that combat violence against women in Egyptian syndicates, as Lawyer Hoda Abdel-Wahab was assaulted on 29 March 2017 in the syndicate by another member of the same syndicate when she was renewing her membership card, in order to ensure accountability for perpetrators and create a safe environment for women lawyers.

Subsequently, Nazra for Feminist Studies urges the United Nations to monitor states' implementation of the WHRD resolution adopted in 2013, as well as Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations with regards to women's human rights in Egypt, to ensure protection of women and WHRDs. We also urge the United Nations to call on Egyptian authorities to close case 173, and the persecution of HRDs and WHRDs, as without their empowerment, human rights would be jeopardized and violations would not be exposed.